



Higher Education

Background

To compete in an increasingly global workplace, Washington needs to attract the best and brightest – both students and faculty. One of the smartest investments we can make in the future economic health of our state is ensuring every citizen has the opportunity for a high-quality, affordable education.

Solution

Senate Democrats worked hard this session to increase accessibility to our state's public colleges and universities. We took a hard look at what the state needs to do to ease the enrollment crunch, to keep up with high-demand fields and to build cutting-edge facilities. It is our goal that no one in Washington is denied an education because of space or geographic location.

Session Victories

Enhanced access

Our colleges are bursting at the seams. By 2010, we will need an additional 26,000 enrollment slots just to keep up with current demand in our state.

HB 1794 greatly expands access to baccalaureate degrees in Washington, where the demand for higher education is quickly outgrowing capacity. Among its provisions, the measure gives some branch campuses the go-ahead to enroll freshmen and sophomores beginning in fall 2006, and allows the community and technical college system to develop selected bachelor's degrees in high-demand fields and in areas of the state where such degrees aren't currently offered.

Further, the final 2005-2007 operating budget provides 7,900 additional higher education enrollment slots.

We must continue investing in higher education if we want to produce world-class graduates ready to compete nationally and internationally.

Higher education faculty

Many part-time faculty members at community and technical colleges do just as much work as full-time faculty, yet they are not compensated accordingly. Students pay the same tuition no matter what their teacher's status. If we want to attract the high-quality faculty that will in turn attract top-notch students, we need to support an effort to implement and maintain pay

equity. SB 5087 calls for a review and update of a 1998 best practices audit of compensation packages and conditions of employment for part-time faculty.

Further, the operating budget includes \$4.5 million for part-time faculty pay equity.

Affordable tuition

No one should be denied a higher education because the costs are prohibitive.

SB 5926 strengthens our state's Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) program, one way to help families afford college.

We recognize that we needed to provide additional financial assistance to middle-class families, who are often unable to afford the entire college tuition bill yet are ineligible for many financial assistance programs. The budget boosts the number of students eligible for a State Need Grant. The new threshold is 65 percent of median family income (\$43,000 for a family of four).

The final operating budget does authorize resident undergraduate tuition increases: up to 7 percent for research institutions, 6 percent for comprehensives and The Evergreen State College, and 5 percent for community and technical colleges.

World-class facilities

The capital budget includes money to improve higher education facilities around the state and anticipate future capacity issues. Money is earmarked for the Washington State University-Spokane Riverpoint nursing facility, which serves four institutions. The Higher Education Coordinating Board received funding to assess the higher education needs in Snohomish, Skagit and Island counties.

The budget also provides for numerous community and technical college improvements.

Other higher education initiatives

Among other important higher education items in the budget: \$500,000 to establish an endowed chair in Korean studies at the University of Washington, and \$1.13 million for the Northwest (Eastern Washington University) and UW-Tacoma Autism Centers.